

ZECHARIAH

Chapter 11

Open your doors, O Lebanon, so that fire may devour your cedars! ²Wail, O pine tree, for the cedar has fallen; the stately trees are ruined! Wail, oaks of Bashan; the dense forest has been cut down! ³Listen to the wail of the shepherds; their rich pastures are destroyed! Listen to the roar of the lions; the lush thicket of the Jordan is ruined!

11:1–3 Some interpret this brief poem as a taunt song anticipating the lament that will be sung over the destruction of the nations' power and arrogance (ch. 10), represented by the cedar, the pine and the oak (vv. 1–2). Their kings are represented by the shepherds and the lions (v. 3). Understood in this way, vv. 1–3 would provide the conclusion to the preceding section. Other interpreters, however, without denying the presence of figurative language, see the piece more literally as a description of the devastation of Syro-Palestine due to the rejection of the Messianic Good Shepherd (vv. 4–14). Verses 1–3 would then furnish the introduction to the next section. The geography of the text—Lebanon, Bashan and Jordan—would seem to favor this interpretation. Part of the fulfillment would be the destruction and further subjugation of the area by the Romans, including the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and of Masada in 73. Understood in this way, the passage is in sharp contrast with ch. 10 and its prediction of Israel's full deliverance and restoration to the covenant land. Now the scene is one of desolation for the land (vv. 1–3), followed by the threat of judgment and disaster for both land and people (vv. 4–6). (CSB)

11:1 *Lebanon.* This is like a general at the enemies' gates, the Lord commanded Lebanon to open its doors to devastation. Judgment was inevitable and could not be stopped. Lebanon was famous for its majestic cedar trees, symbols of strength. But they could not withstand the Lord's fiery destruction. (TLSB)

11:2 *Bashan.* The Israelites took this region from the Amorite king, Og, at the time of the conquest of Canaan (Nu 21:33–35). It was allotted to the half-tribe of Manasseh (Jos 13:29–30; 17:5). (CSB)

Bashan is a region east of the Jordan and was famous for its oaks. These trees are called to lament the ruin of the glorious cedars of Lebanon. All nature is stunned by God's judgment. (TLSB)

dense forest. Of Lebanon. (CSB)

11:3 If the language is figurative, the shepherds and lions represent the rulers or leaders of the Jews (see v. 5; 10:3; cf. Jer 25:34–36). (CSB)

Shepherds live close to nature. Seeing the ruin of something so stately as the cedars of Lebanon leads them to lament. Note the reference in 10:3 to shepherds who will also be the subject of God's judgment. (TLSB)

lush thicket of the Jordan. Where the lions had their lairs. (CSB)

The tropical jungle on both banks of the lower Jordan River is a habitat for lions and was also ruined when God's judgment struck. (TLSB)

IS RUINED – The description is short and bold, but comprehensive enough to indicate that the Lord is speaking of another desolation of the Holy Land, by which everything that was great and mighty in the country would be overthrown and the Holy Land once more become a wilderness. It is an evident reference to the conquest of Palestine by the Romans. (Kretzmann)

Two Shepherds

⁴This is what the LORD my God says: “Pasture the flock marked for slaughter. ⁵ Their buyers slaughter them and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, ‘Praise the LORD, I am rich!’ Their own shepherds do not spare them. ⁶ For I will no longer have pity on the people of the land,” declares the LORD. “I will hand everyone over to his neighbor and his king. They will oppress the land, and I will not rescue them from their hands.” ⁷ So I pastured the flock marked for slaughter, particularly the oppressed of the flock. Then I took two staffs and called one Favor and the other Union, and I pastured the flock. ⁸ In one month I got rid of the three shepherds. The flock detested me, and I grew weary of them ⁹ and said, “I will not be your shepherd. Let the dying die, and the perishing perish. Let those who are left eat one another’s flesh.” ¹⁰ Then I took my staff called Favor and broke it, revoking the covenant I had made with all the nations. ¹¹ It was revoked on that day, and so the afflicted of the flock who were watching me knew it was the word of the LORD. ¹² I told them, “If you think it best, give me my pay; but if not, keep it.” So they paid me thirty pieces of silver. ¹³ And the LORD said to me, “Throw it to the potter”—the handsome price at which they priced me! So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter. ¹⁴ Then I broke my second staff called Union, breaking the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to me, “Take again the equipment of a foolish shepherd. ¹⁶ For I am going to raise up a shepherd over the land who will not care for the lost, or seek the young, or heal the injured, or feed the healthy, but will eat the meat of the choice sheep, tearing off their hoofs. ¹⁷ “Woe to the worthless shepherd, who deserts the flock! May the sword strike his arm and his right eye! May his arm be completely withered, his right eye totally blinded!”

11:4–14 The reason for the judgment on Israel in vv. 1–3 is now given, namely, the people's rejection of the Messianic Shepherd-King. Just as the Servant in the “servant songs” rejected, so here the Good Shepherd (a royal figure) is rejected. The same Messianic King is in view in both instances. (CSB)

This parable describes how the Lord abandoned His people, the flock doomed to slaughter. These actions were not necessarily in chronological order and likely referred to events that occurred previously in Israel's history. As with Jesus' parables, it is the overall point that is important. Symbolically (not literally), the prophet is commanded to shepherd the flock. He describes their suffering at the hands of external and internal enemies. Finally, the Lord and His prophet, whom the flock came to detest, no longer have pity on them (vv 6, 9). (TLSB)

11:4 says. To Zechariah.

flock. Israel. (CSB)

11:5 *Those.* Sheep traders (v 7); probably referring to wicked rulers (cf Ezk 34:1–10). (TLSB)

buyers. The sheep (the Jews) are bought as slaves by outsiders. Part of the fulfillment came in A.D. 70 and the following years. (CSB)

Blessed be the LORD. Wicked rulers mask their fleecing of the sheep with pious words. (TLSB)

I AM RICH – This is the expression fitly describing the self-satisfaction felt by the hard-hearted masters in enriching themselves at the expense of the flock. (Kretzmann)

Those who sell them. "Their own shepherds (rulers or leaders)." (CSB)

One is compelled to think of the attitude of the rulers of the people at the time of Jesus and before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. (Kretzmann)

11:6 Neighbor and king violently overwhelmed the inhabitants of the land, the flock was doomed to slaughter, and the Lord did nothing to intervene. (TLSB)

land. Palestine. (CSB)

king. Perhaps the Roman emperor (cf. Jn 19:15). (CSB)

They. Includes the Romans prophetically. (CSB)

11:7 *I.* Zechariah, as a type (foreshadowing) of the Messianic Shepherd-King.

The prophet/shepherd gave names to his two staves that describe the Lord's historic relationship with Israel: His favor and the union they enjoyed with Him and one another. Both staves will be broken (vv 10, 14). (TLSB)

called one Favor. To ensure divine favor on the flock.

Hbr *no 'am*, “delightfulness,” “pleasantness.” (TLSB)

The KJV says “I called Beauty,” or “loveliness, favor,” such as the Lord intended to show His people through the work of His servant. (Kretzmann)

Union. See Eze 37:15–28. Such unity would be the result of the gracious leadership of the Good Shepherd. (For the significance of the subsequent breaking of the two staffs see vv. 10, 14.) (CSB)

This is to indicate that the Lord wanted to have His people feel the blessings of true unity over against the oppression of all their enemies. (Kretzmann)

11:8 *got rid of the three shepherds.* Although the three cannot be specifically identified, the Good Shepherd will dispose of all such unfit leaders. (CSB)

Commentators have offered more than 40 different suggestions as to their exact identity. They probably represent leaders of Israel. (TLSB)

These might well have been the wicked civil authorities, the priests, and the scribes of the Jewish nation being probably meant, who were removed from power in a very short time. (Kretzmann)

I grew weary of them. Cf. Isa 1:13–14. (CSB)

He, the type of the one Good Shepherd and Ruler of His Church, became impatient with their perverse impenitence. (Kretzmann)

detested me. Describes the deterioration of the relationship between shepherd and flock. (TLSB)

11:9 *I will not be your shepherd.* The prophet gave up caring about the people, just as the Lord had done, and turned them over to their enemies. (TLSB)

Let the dying die. The Good Shepherd terminates his providential care of the sheep. (CSB)

eat one another's flesh. According to Josephus, this actually happened during the Roman siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 (cf. also La 4:10). (CSB)

11:10 *covenant.* Apparently a covenant of security and restraint, by which the Shepherd had been holding back the nations from his people (cf. Eze 34:25; Hos 2:18). Now, however, the nations (e.g., the Romans) will be permitted to overrun them. (CSB)

The prophet had taken on the responsibility of tending the flock, but now this covenant was annulled. He broke the staff called Favor to symbolize this termination. (TLSB)

11:11 *the afflicted of the flock.* Probably the faithful few, who recognize the authoritative word of the Lord (see also v. 7, where the same Hebrew phrase is rendered “the oppressed of the flock”). (CSB)

Wicked rulers recognized that the prophet’s actions were a revelation of the will of the Lord, who no longer had pity on His people (v 6). (TLSB)

it. Probably Israel’s affliction by the nations. (CSB)

word of the LORD. The faithful discern that what happens (e.g., the judgment on Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70) is a fulfillment of God’s prophetic word—as a result of such actions as those denounced in Mt 23, which led to the rejection of the Good Shepherd. (CSB)

11:12 *give me my pay.* Refers to the severance of the relationship. (CSB)

keep it. A more emphatic way of ending the relationship. (CSB)

thirty pieces of silver. The price of a slave among the Israelites in ancient times also, a way of indicating a trifling amount. (CSB)

Shepherds expected wages for their work. The prophet’s request of the sheep traders is a bit ironic: will you pay me for turning over the flock to destruction? The wicked rulers were willing to give him 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave, showed how calloused their hearts were. This is the same amount Judas received for betraying Jesus. (TLSB)

11:13 *Throw it to the potter.* Possibly a proverbial saying expressing disdain or disgust at the action of the sheep traders. (TLSB)

handsome price. Irony and sarcasm. (CSB)

threw them into the house of the LORD to the potter. For the NT use of vv. 12–13 see Mt 26:14–15; 27:3–10. (CSB)

The prophet performed this act publicly, throwing down the silver coins in the temple just as Judas would later do (Mt. 27:5). (TLSB)

11:14 *broke my second staff called Union.* Signifying the dissolution of the covenant nation, particularly of the unity between the south and the north. The breaking up of the nation into parties hostile to each other was characteristic of later Jewish history; it greatly hindered the popular cause in the war against Rome (cf. Jn 11:48). (CSB)

This is to show that, by the punishment of God, there might be lasting dissension in the Jewish camp, a peculiarity which, in the later history of the people, contributed much

toward the rapid overthrow of the nation. Sin is a reproach to any people, but the height of folly is the denial and rejection of the Messiah, the one Good Shepherd. (Kretzmann)

annulling the brotherhood. The prophet broke the second staff, Union, and so annulled the brotherhood between Judah and Israel. This happened historically when the northern tribes rebelled against Judah after Solomon's death (1Ki 12:16–20). (TLSB)

11:15-16 This short proverb makes the same point as the previous section. The Lord commanded the prophet to act out the role of a foolish shepherd who has no fear of the Lord (Pr 1:7). Such a ruler was equipped with all the devices of evil. (TLSB)

11:15 *again.* See v. 7. (CSB)

foolish shepherd. With the Shepherd of the Lord's choice removed from the scene, a foolish and worthless (v. 17) shepherd replaces him. A selfish, greedy, corrupt leader will arise and afflict the flock (the people of Israel). (CSB)

11:16 *shepherd.* A foolish leader. (TLSB)

seek the young. Cf. Ge 33:13; Isa 40:11. (CSB)

tearing off their hoofs. Apparently in a greedy search for the last edible piece. (CSB)

Likely a proverbial saying meaning that the flesh of the fat ones will be totally consumed. (TLSB)

11:17 *worthless shepherd.* This counterfeit shepherd may have found a partial historical fulfillment in such leaders as Simeon bar Kosiba or Kokhba (who led the Jewish revolt against the Romans in A.D. 132–135 and who was hailed as the Messiah by Rabbi Akiba). But it would seem that the final stage of the progressive fulfillment of the complete prophecy awaits the rise of the final antichrist (cf. Eze 34:2–4; Da 11:36–39; Jn 5:43; 2Th 2:3–10; Rev 13:1–8). (CSB)

Curse on the “worthless shepherd” (cf v 16). (TLSB)

deserts the flock. Contrast the Good Shepherd of Jn 10:11–16. (CSB)

May his arm be completely withered. May his power be paralyzed. (CSB)

his right eye totally blinded. May his intelligence be nullified. Thus this leader will be powerless to fight. (CSB)

Representing the shepherd's physical and mental abilities. Removing them made him unable to function. (TLSB)

It will hardly do to limit this prophecy to an earthly, temporal power. It seems rather that the Spirit of the Lord, looking forward in the history of the Church, outlined in a few strokes the kingdom of Antichrist erected in the midst of those who rejected the Redeemer in the fullness of His grace and mercy, indicating at the same time that his power would be broken by the power of the Lord, as it was in the Reformation. (Kretzmann)

Ch 11 The chapter begins with a lament over the Lord's coming judgment, followed by a description of how He abandoned His flock and no longer had pity on them. This chastisement is God's "strange" work. His "proper" work is to comfort. "[Isaiah] calls it the 'strange' work of the Lord when He terrifies, because to make alive and comfort is God's own proper work. But He terrifies ... for this reason—that there may be a place for comfort and making alive" (Ap XIIA 51). We are accused by God's Law and threatened with punishment for our sins. God intends this to lead us to repentance so that, trusting in Christ's merits, we might enjoy eternal comfort and peace. • Lord, be my Good Shepherd and show me Your favor. Amen. (TLSB)